GOVERNOR'S VETO
AB 2301 (Soria)
As Enrolled August 30, 2026
2/3 vote

SUMMARY

Requires the California Community College (CCC) Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) to develop a Baccalaureate Degree in Nursing (BSN) Pilot Program that authorizes select community college districts (CCD) to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree. The bill would limit the pilot program to 10 CCDs statewide and would require the CCCCO to identify and select eligible community college districts based on specified criteria.

1) Requires that, notwithstanding existing law, the CCCCO to develop a BSN Pilot Program that authorizes select CCDs to offer a BSN degree.

2) Specifies that the pilot program will be limited to 10 CCDs statewide. The CCCCO will identify and select eligible CCDs based on the following criteria:

   a) The CCCCO is encouraged to ensure there is equitable access between the northern, central, and southern parts of the state to the pilot program;

   b) Priority will be given to CCDs located in underserved nursing areas;

   c) Priority will be given to CCDs where the service area of the CCD includes communities with persistent poverty; and,

   d) The CCDs must have a nationally accredited nursing program.

3) Requires a CCD selected for the pilot program to continue to offer an associate degree in nursing (ADN) program.

4) Specifies that the total number of ADN and BSN students at a CCD will be limited to the CCD's ADN class size approved by the Board of Registered Nursing, and the total number of participants in a pilot program established pursuant to this article will be limited to 25% of that class size, or 35 students, whichever is greater.

5) CCDs without a nationally accredited nursing program, but that are in "candidate" status, may be provisionally selected to participate in the pilot program, and may commence the program upon final accreditation. Regarding this provision, priority will be given to CCDs located in the central valley and the Inland Empire. If a CCD that is provisionally selected is found to be making untimely progress toward accreditation, after notice and an opportunity to cure, the chancellor's office may withdraw the provisional selection and may select a different CCD to participate in the pilot program.

6) Requires the CCCCO to develop a process designed to assist CCD with nursing programs that are applying for national accreditation for the purpose of qualifying for the pilot program, and that assistance will be made available to community college districts upon request.

7) Requires that each participating CCDs give priority registration for enrollment in the pilot program to students with an ADN from that CCD.

8) Requires the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) to conduct an evaluation of the pilot program to determine the effectiveness of the program and the need to continue or expand the program. The evaluation will include, but is not limited to, all of the following:

   a) How many, and which specific, CCDs applied for the pilot program;

   b) The number of pilot programs implemented, including information identifying the number of enrollments and degree recipients;

   c) Which of the selected CCDs developed a pilot program in an underserved nursing area;

   d) Which CCDs were selected to participate in the pilot program and why they were selected;

   e) The pilot program costs and the funding sources that were used to finance each of the pilot programs;

   f) The cost charged to students, including tuition and any additional fees;

   g) The extent to which instruction was provided in person or online;

   h) Current completion rates, if available, for each cohort of students participating in a pilot program;

   i) Time-to-degree rates and completion rates for each pilot program;

   j) The extent to which each pilot program established as specified is in compliance with the requirements of this proposal;

   k) Other factors to consider when expanding BSN opportunities across the state; and,

   l) Recommendations on whether and how the authorization establishing the pilot program should be extended.

9) Requires each participating CCD to submit the information necessary for the evaluation conducted pursuant to paragraph 8) above, as determined by the LAO, to the CCCCO. Requires the CCCCO to provide the information received from the CCDs to the LAO upon request.

10) Requires the results of the evaluation to be submitted to the Legislature, as specified, on or before July 1, 2034.

11) Specifies that provisions of current law regarding CCC baccalaureate degrees, as specifies, does not apply to a BSN offered pursuant to this proposal.

12) Defines, for purposes of this proposal, hat "underserved nursing area" means a registered nurse shortage area designated at a high-, medium-, or low-severity level as identified by the Department of Health Care Access and Information.

13) Specifies that the provisions of this proposal remain in effect only until January 1, 2036, and as of that date is repealed.

Governor's Veto Message
"This bill requires the California Community College (CCC) Chancellor's Office to establish a Community College Baccalaureate Degree in Nursing Pilot Program that would authorize 10 community college districts to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree.

This year, I proudly signed SB 960 and AB 2694 to create a statewide framework for community college districts to establish baccalaureate programs already offered by other public higher education institutions. This framework is inclusive of all academic programs, so long as specified criteria are met – such as a demonstrated workforce demand and lack of capacity in regional universities. Given this progress, it is neither necessary nor appropriate to authorize an additional pilot or create an exception to the framework, as this bill proposes. California's public higher education segments should instead focus on implementing this newly created comprehensive system.

Additionally, the 2024 Budget Agreement included $60 million per year, from 2025-26 to 2028-29, for the Rebuilding Nursing Infrastructure Grant Program, which community colleges can use to expand BSN partnerships with the University of California, California State University, and independent nonprofit higher education institutions. These partnerships have proven successful in increasing BSN degree recipients and access for community college students.

All segments of higher education should continue collaborating to build these programs."

COMMENTS

Master Plan for Higher Education. As outlined in the Master Plan for Higher Education and by state statute, the CCCs are designated to have an open admission policy and bear the most extensive responsibility for lower-division undergraduate instruction. Its three primary areas of mission include education leading to associates degrees and university transfer, career technical education, and basic skills. The primary mission of the CSU is undergraduate and graduate instruction through the master's degree. The UC was granted the sole authority to independently offer doctoral degrees.

Notwithstanding the differentiation of the mission envisioned by the Master Plan, as outlined in statute, the Legislature authorized the CSU to go beyond its original mission to offer six professional doctoral degrees which include the Au.D, Ed.D, D.P.T., DNP, OTD, and Dr.PH. Each program was individually approved through legislation. Fees were capped at the rate charged at the UC, no additional funding was provided by the state, and these programs were to be implemented without diminishing or reducing enrollment in undergraduate programs. Additionally, the CSU programs that offer applied doctorates were not duplicative of degrees offered by UC.

Nursing programs in California. Graduates of associate and BSN degree programs may sit for nurse licensure exams and become licensed registered nurses. The state's Board of Registered Nursing (BRN) approves all of California's pre-licensure nursing programs offered by public and private colleges and makes decisions about the number of students that new and existing nursing programs are allowed to enroll. The number of nursing programs in the state totals 152, with

102 public, 92 associate degrees in nursing, 47 BSN, and 13 Entry Level Master's (ELM) programs.

According to the most recent BRN annual school report (2022-2023), California graduated about 13,984 students in 2022-23 from registered nursing programs, which represents a 20% increase in student completions since 2016. Associate's degree completions decreased while bachelor's degrees and ELM nursing completions increased. The number of joint associate degrees in nursing and bachelor's programs has increased over the last 10 years. The time it takes a student to graduate from a program varies by degree. An associate degree in nursing prepares students for registered nursing care in a variety of settings in two-to-three years, whereas a bachelor's degree takes about four years to train students for registered nursing care as well as administrative and leadership positions. An ELM is a one- to two- year program for baccalaureate degree holders in other fields seeking to become registered nurses. All schools are required to provide clinical instruction with clinical placement in a health care facility in each phase of the educational process. Students must pass a national licensure examination to earn a license.

According to the Author
According to the author, "California's current healthcare workforce development apparatus is not equipped to handle the growing nursing needs of the state, especially in disadvantaged communities in more rural parts of the state. While California's Community College system can reach these communities and does offer associates degrees in nursing, the needs of the healthcare workforce more frequently demand a bachelor's degree. This level of degree is exclusive in California to private institutions that are prohibitively expensive or the UC and CSU systems that have limited capacity and difficulty serving areas of the state with the highest need. In order to meet our nursing workforce needs and extend these career opportunities to Californians throughout the state, we must expand the role of our community college system. AB 2301 will take the first steps in this process by allowing a limited number of campuses to expand their nursing programs to offer Bachelors of Science in nursing degree."

Arguments in Support
The CCCCO wrote in support, noting that "AB 2301 presents a timely and necessary opportunity to expand equitable access to baccalaureate nursing education by leveraging the strength of community college nursing programs. California currently faces a projected 18 percent registered nurse shortage by 2037, with the most severe impacts concentrated in rural and underserved regions. At the same time, demand for BSN-prepared nurses continues to outpace supply. In 2023–24, there were 19,939 qualified BSN applications for just 9,812 enrollment slots statewide, leaving tens of thousands of students without access to a pathway forward. AB 2301 provides them with an opportunity to earn a BSN, which has dual benefit to the state by expanding the pipeline of professional nurses. address these challenges by expanding affordable, local BSN pathways for our students"

The CCCCO continued, noting that CCCs "…can address regional health disparities by increasing baccalaureate degree attainment in regions that do not provide equitable access to BSN programs. The California Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI) found that the BSN pathway is now twice as common as ADNs, yet education levels are unevenly distributed throughout the state. Students in the Central Coast, Northern and Sierra regions, and San Joaquin Valley are more likely to pursue ADNs because they cannot afford or access BSN schools. While this crisis can be partially addressed through collaborative

partnerships between community colleges and existing BSN programs, additional capacity is urgently needed to avoid nursing shortages that exacerbate regional equity gaps. Community colleges can support this critical need by scaling our ADN programs into nursing baccalaureate degrees."

The California Hospital Association (CHA) wrote in support, stating that "California's health care workforce crisis is only growing, with the National Center for Health Workforce projecting that by 2038, the state will be short more than 84,750 full-time nurses — the largest nursing shortage in the U.S. and a sharp increase from previous projections of 65,000 full-time nurses by 2037. Nurses are often patients' primary point of contact, providing not just clinical care but also information, compassion, and more. They are integral to providing high-quality care, and a shortage of this magnitude would severely impact patient care statewide.

The CHA continues, writing "by expanding baccalaureate degrees in nursing to community colleges, AB 2301 would empower more students to pursue higher education in nursing, helping to meet the demand for highly qualified nurses in health care settings. Many hospitals prefer that nurses hold baccalaureate degrees, as this helps hospitals meet accreditation and quality standards; the education that AB 2301 would make possible opens more doors for graduates, increasing their opportunities for jobs and career advancement. Community colleges play a vital role in providing accessible and quality postsecondary education, particularly for students facing financial, geographical, and logistical challenges. They also serve a more diverse student population, which would help the nursing workforce better reflect its community — an important step toward better patient care and improved outcomes."

A joint letter from the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) notes that "The shortage of health professionals in California, and particularly in rural areas of the state, has been a persistent concern for many years, and has become more acute in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the aging of the health care workforce. Rural areas with smaller populations that are farther from urban centers often have the lowest supply of health professionals per capita. Further, rural California does not have a high concentration of the four-year universities needed for graduate degree health professionals; however, often these communities have access to community college programs. However, problems are not isolated to rural areas. The Inland Empire and the Central Valley are two of the fastest growing regions in California, and they are the two areas that have the lowest per capita health workforce. It's also a challenge to recruit and retain people in the Central Valley and Inland Empire that reflect the diversity and language capabilities of these regions."

Arguments in Opposition
The CSU Chancellor's Office wrote in opposition, stating that "CSU universities offer several online Associate Degrees in nursing (ADN) to BSN programs which serve rural students and allow them to fulfill all upper division coursework remotely while a community health clinical requirement is completed in the student's local area. Twenty CSU campuses offer ADN-to-BSN programs, and the CSU partners with 49 community colleges on concurrent ADN-to-BSN pathways to further shorten time to completion. Since 2017, the CSU has consistently graduated more than 1,000 students each year through these programs. We believe these programs are the most appropriate and proven path forward to achieve an increase in the number of nurses."

Further, the CSU notes that they believe "the bill also raises several concerns about the potential impacts on California's higher education segments. AB 2301, like several measures introduced

this session, expands or alters higher education authorities without fully accounting for the operational, financial, and administrative impacts on institutions and the state. We believe that any proposal that shifts institutions' roles should include, at minimum, statewide duplication standards to ensure efficient use of state resources and quality metrics to ensure positive student outcomes. Additionally, a full fiscal analysis across higher education segments and K-12 to understand how these degree expansions will impact Prop. 98 funding distributions and each segment's core mission. Changes in intersegmental responsibilities of this scale warrant a comprehensive evaluation to ensure that unintended consequences are fully considered and addressed. Given the potential statewide implications on all higher education segments, we believe this issue would benefit from a larger, more inclusive conversation involving all parties. The CSU welcomes this conversation and is ready to engage on a balanced approach that is student-centered, builds on the strengths of each segment's mission, and preserves fiscal sustainability of California's higher education system."

The Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU) also wrote in opposition, stating "the independent California college and university (ICCU) sector is a leading producer of the nursing workforce in the state. Over 25 institutions within the sector offer nursing degrees, and ICCUs collectively produce 51% of the four year and advanced degree holders educated within the state. As outlined in a letter we jointly submitted earlier this year alongside our four-year segmental counterparts and the California Association of Colleges of Nursing, we have several ideas for ways in which the state can make improvements to the nursing education regulatory and policy space to expand opportunities for nursing students."

AICCU also noted that their "…concerns with this proposal are consistent with our concerns expressed in prior proposals to expand baccalaureate degree authority for nursing, including:

1) The bill does not address capacity constraints to the nursing pipeline such as the availability of clinical placements.

2) Research by UC San Francisco suggests that the statewide nursing gap is projected to close by 2028. While there are pertinent discussions to have about regional workforce needs, we believe there are other policy considerations the Legislature could consider to address those in place of new degree authority for community colleges.

3) Existing online BSN programs are viable options for many students in rural communities. While we acknowledge that access to high-speed internet remains an issue in some rural communities, we believe that student data from CalBright College's 2024 Milestones Report indicates that students in 34 of the state's 40 rural counties are able to access online coursework.

Rather than compound the existing challenges in the nursing educator pipeline, we believe that the Legislature should instead look to incentivize and promote collaborative, intersegmental partnerships through models such as concurrent enrollment and accelerated pathways."

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, this bill would have the following fiscal impact:

1) The Chancellor's Office indicates that there could be one-time Proposition 98 General Fund costs for each pilot district to create and implement a Bachelor of Science of Nursing degree program, but these start-up costs could be absorbable within existing resources. These costs would encompass any updates to the design of new nursing academic standards, student learning outcomes, updates to existing curriculum that would be needed to satisfy the program, and implementation of other coursework requirements. The Chancellor's Office estimates these costs could range from $80,000 to $138,000 per pilot district but they can be implemented by operating within the current community college Associate Degree in Nursing infrastructure.

2) The Chancellor's office estimates one-time General Fund workload costs of up to $33,000 to develop the application for the pilot program, issue guidance, and provide technical assistance.

3) The costs for the Legislative Analyst Office to complete the evaluation is expected to be minor and absorbable within existing resources.

VOTES

ASM HIGHER EDUCATION: 8-0-2
YES: Fong, DeMaio, Boerner, Macedo, Jackson, Patel, Ramos, Tangipa
ABS, ABST OR NV: Muratsuchi, Sharp-Collins

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 13-1-1
YES: Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache, Ta, Tangipa
NO: Dixon
ABS, ABST OR NV: Sharp-Collins

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 71-0-9
YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Elhawary, Ellis, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas
ABS, ABST OR NV: Arambula, Castillo, Dixon, Flora, Johnson, Lackey, Muratsuchi, Celeste Rodriguez, Sharp-Collins

SENATE FLOOR: 40-0-0
YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

UPDATED

VERSION: August 30, 2026

CONSULTANT: Kevin Powers / HIGHER ED. / (916) 319-3960 FN: 0004577